

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3410

INFO USDEL JEC PARIS IMMEDIATE

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CINCPAC HONOLULU IMMEDIATE

JCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE

USSAG NKP THAILAND IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SAIGON 2580

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS VS

SUBJECT: NORTH VIETNAMESE SPRING OFFENSIVE

1. IT IS NOW CLEAR THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SPRING OFFENSIVE HAS BEGUN. IT IS DEVELOPING ALONG THE LINES INDICATED BY THE INTELLIGENCE IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS WITH INITIAL PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON:

A. INTERDICTION OF KEY HIGHWAYS;

B. EFFORTS TO SEIZE MORE REMOTE REAL ESTATE AND POPULATION CENTERS (PRIMARILY IN WESTERN MILITARY REGION 2) WHICH ARE DIFFICULT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO REINFORCE WITHOUT DRAWING MAJOR RESOURCES AWAY FROM THE MORE IMPORTANT AREAS OF THE COUNTRY; AND

C. MILITARY PRESSURE IN OTHER AREAS DESIGNED TO PIN DOWN THE RVNAF AND EXPLOIT ANY SUCCESSES WHICH MIGHT MATERIALIZE.

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2. MORE DETAILED REPORTING ON THE DEVELOPING MILITARY SITUATION WILL BE COMING TO WASHINGTON THROUGH VARIOUS REPORTING CHANNELS OF THIS MISSION. THE MAIN OUTLINES OF THE SITUATION AT THIS TIME ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. THE INITIAL NORTH VIETNAMESE MAIN FORCE EFFORT BEGAN IN VIETNAM'S MILITARY REGION 2 WITH ATTACKS AGAINST THE PRINCIPAL EAST-WEST COMMUNICATIONS LINES, NAMELY ROUTES 19 AND 21 AS WELL AS ROUTE 14 IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF THE REGION. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE FIGHTING UNDERWAY IN QUANG DUC PROVINCE, ESPECIALLY AT DUC LAP WHICH ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS HAS FALLEN. THERE IS ALSO FIGHTING IN PROGRESS INSIDE BAN ME THUOT CITY (CAPITAL OF DARLAC PROVINCE) WHICH WAS ATTACKED EARLY THIS MORNING. (THERE ARE 14 AMERICANS IN BAN ME THUOT AS WELL AS IRANIAN AND INDONESIAN ICCS PERSONNEL). SEE SEPARATE MESSAGE ON AMERICANS.) RVNAF IS REACTING VIGOROUSLY TO THESE ATTACKS.

B. BEGINNING MARCH 8 THE NORTH VIETNAMESE BEGAN OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS NORTH OF THE HAI VAN PASS INCLUDING QUANG TRI PROVINCE AND THUA THIEN PROVINCE NORTHEAST, SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST OF HUE WHERE CONSIDERABLE FIGHTING IS NOW IN PROGRESS. THERE HAS BEEN NO RPT NO ATTACK YET ACROSS THE MAIN CEASE-FIRE LINE NEAR QUANG TRI.

C. IN SOUTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY REGION 3 THE ENEMY APPEARS TO HAVE INITIATED A SERIES OF SMALL PROBING ACTIONS WHICH AT THIS STAGE ARE INTERPRETED AS A PRELUDE TO LARGE SCALE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS TO BEGIN SHORTLY. WE ANTICIPATE THAT THE MAIN THRUST OF THIS EFFORT WILL BE TO CUT OFF TAY NINH.

3. THE DEVELOPMENTS DESCRIBED ABOVE MUST BE SEEN IN LIGHT OF THE MAJOR INFILTRATION MOVE FROM NORTH VIETNAM TO THE SOUTH IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS OR SO AND ESPECIALLY IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. AT RECENT AND CURRENT RATES SOME 56,000 INFILTRATORS WILL HAVE MOVED FROM NORTH VIETNAM TO THE SOUTH BETWEEN THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY AND THE MIDDLE OF MARCH AND THIS IS EXCLUSIVE OF SOME 9-10,000 WHICH HAVE PROBABLY ENTERED LAOS AS WELL AS THE INTEGRAL UNIT MOVES DESCRIBED BELOW. AT THIS RATE INFILTRATION HAS BEEN DOUBLED THAT OF THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR AND IS ABOUT 50 PERCENT GREATER THAN REGISTERED AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR

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IN 1972. VERY OMINOUS IS AN INTEGRAL UNIT MOVE TOTALLING ABOUT 1650 PERSONNEL CONSISTING OF ELEMENTS OF NORTH VIETNAM'S STRATEGIC RESERVE WHICH BEGAN TO MOVE SOUTH ON MARCH 6 AND REACHED THE AREA NORTH OF THE DMZ ON MARCH 10.

4. WHAT WE HAVE PREDICTED FOR SOME TIME IS THUS COMING TO PASS ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE, AND INDEED IS LIKELY, THAT THE TIMING OF THESE MAJOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS BY THE NORTH VIETNAMESE

HAS BEEN SLIGHTLY DELAYED BECAUSE OF THE RECENT CONGRESSIONAL
VISIT TO VIETNAM. WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARMED
FORCES WILL REACT VIGOROUSLY AS THE INITIAL MEASURES TAKEN IN
MILITARY REGION 2 ALREADY INDICATE. IN DOING SO, THEY WILL,
OF COURSE, DRAW DOWN THEIR RESERVE SUPPLIES, ESPECIALLY AMMUNITION
AND FUEL, AT A RAPIDLY INCREASING RATE.
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